

BLUE HILL

Suzanne Taylor, a cookbook author who never met a cuisine she wouldn't try, died Jan. 5, 2004, in Blue Hill of complications following a head injury. In the vernacular Mrs. Taylor often used when speaking of death, she "went aloft" at the age of 94, just short of her 95th birthday. She died in the Blue Hill Memorial Hospital.

Born in Philadelphia on Jan. 24, 1909, she was the daughter of Horace Combes, a jeweler who met a beguiling young Norwegian woman who was visiting her brother in Pennsylvania. They met at a dance in Philadelphia and later, enchanted by her beauty, he pursued the young Ellinor Wallem back to Norway, where he married her. Combes knew only two Norwegian sentences — "please bring me some hot water" and "I love you." Apparently, this was sufficient to win her hand. The couple eventually had one child, Suzanne.

Mrs. Taylor was raised in Philadelphia, but spent summers in Europe, mostly with family in Norway. She was graduated from Germantown Friends School in Philadelphia, then went on to the Ecole Ménagère Brillantmont in Lausanne, Switzerland, for two years. In 1929, she married Francis Robinson of Hartford, Conn., and moved to Paris. Their daughter, Ellinor (now Ellinor Mitchell) was born in Lausanne in August of 1930, and soon after, the family returned to Robinson's home in Hartford. They later moved to Oyster Bay, N.Y., and spent summers in Europe. All the while, she was taking singing lessons with an eye to a professional musical career. The couple divorced in 1936 and with her young daughter in tow, she moved to New York City and continued her musical education. In 1939, a close friend who was in theater said she should really get some experience performing on stage if she was serious about becoming a professional. The friend, the late Marjorie Ewing, told Mrs. Taylor of the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Va., and soon the young singer was painting scenery, sewing costumes and appearing in the chorus.

One day in the summer of 1939, while standing around waiting for a rehearsal to start, she saw what she later described as a "devastatingly handsome" guy who turned out to be the director.

"Who's that?" she asked one of her chorusmates. "That's Sam Taylor," was the reply.

Besotted, she went out to a field, picked some flowers, tied them with a ribbon and hung the bunch on the doorknob of his room.

In June of 1940, they were married in New York. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, her husband put his writing skills to work for government agencies in Washington, D.C. The couple had two sons, Michael and David, during the war and in 1945, Sam and Suzanne Taylor spent their first summer in Blue Hill. They became so enamored of the area that shortly after the end of World War II, they bought a waterfront house in East Blue Hill and spent at least three months a year in it, returning to New York for the winter because of his theater work.

Her life in the postwar decades revolved largely around her husband's work and the raising of three children.

During the 1950s and 1960s, a period when her husband had several Broadway hits and was writing screenplays in Hollywood, she helped him by apply-

ing her talents as a cook and hostess, entertaining her husband's friends and associates in theater and film. Among them were Hollywood directors like Alfred Hitchcock (Sam Taylor co-authored "Vertigo"), Broadway composer Richard Rodgers, actors Tyrone Power and Gregory Peck, and such international personalities as Ingrid Bergman, Marlene Dietrich and director Anatole Litvak. She also was a fashion and music consultant to Broadway plays her husband had written. Although she did not hold a job in the traditional sense of the word, she often thought of herself as her husband's working partner — he frequently wrote about a milieu with which she was more familiar, and he quickly availed himself of her sophisticated knowledge. She was his expert first reader and he often edited his writing based on her suggestions.

In 1968, Sam and Suzanne Taylor moved to East Blue Hill to live there full-time. Mrs. Taylor became a well-known member of the community. Every May 17, she celebrated Norwegian Independence Day by hanging a huge Norwegian flag on the side of her house. She started the day by saying, in a loud voice, "Hurrah for Kongen," and for the rest of the family it was known as "be nice to Norway day."

After a newspaper published a feature story detailing her cooking talents and the couple's international life, a Boston publisher called her up and asked her to write about her life. The result was the 1970 book, "Young and Hungry: A Cookbook in the Form of a Memoir." She also wrote magazine articles about cooking and, fluent in French as well as Norwegian, she translated a French gardening book, "Mon Ami, Le Jardin." In 1983, her book, "Cooking from a Country Kitchen," was published. She dedicated the book "to Samuel Taylor, my chief taster and severest critic and favorite kitchenmaid." Mrs. Taylor, who trained at cooking schools in New York, Boston and Europe, also gave cooking classes at her home in East Blue Hill. For a time during the early 1980s, Mrs. Taylor operated, with John Hikade, The Blue Hill Gourmet, selling gourmet take-out food. She also was a consultant to a gourmet shop in Florida.

All through her life, Mrs. Taylor loved animals and had many cats and dogs. Mrs. Taylor and her husband moved into Blue Hill's Parker Ridge retirement community in 1998. Samuel Taylor died in May of 2000. Mrs. Taylor made many close friends at Parker Ridge and they were at her hospital bedside during the last few days of her life.

Suzanne Taylor is survived by her daughter, Ellinor Mitchell of New York and Chilmark, Mass.; two sons, David Taylor of Brookline, Mass., and Brooklin, Me., and Michael Taylor of Berkeley, Calif.; and seven grandchildren, Robert P. Mitchell of Huntington, N.Y., Jennifer Mitchell of Blue Hill, Me., Diana Mitchell of Lolo, Mont., Stephen Mitchell of Beaufort, S.C., Laura Mitchell of York, Me., Susannah Taylor of Barcelona, Spain, and Jennifer Taylor of New York.

The family suggests donations to any of these organizations: Blue Hill Memorial Hospital, P.O. Box 823, Blue Hill, Me. 04614; Blue Hill Public Library, Parker Point Road, Blue Hill, Me. 04614; The Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L St., Washington, D.C. 200037.

A memorial service will take place in Blue Hill in the summer.